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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 001503

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EUN](#) [SMIG](#) [GR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: SECOND FRONTEx INCIDENT IN AEGEAN VIEWED CALMLY, BUT
CONFIRMS GREEK IMMIGRATION SUSPICIONS

REF: A.) ATHENS 1471, B.) 08 ATHENS 1270

CLASSIFIED BY: Deborah A. McCarthy, Deputy Chief of Mission; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The Greek MFA informed us September 18 that they had transcripts and photos from an EU Frontex mission in the Aegean of a Turkish Coast Guard vessel assisting illegal immigrants enter Greek territorial waters and land on the Greek-inhabited island of Farmakonisi. This September 14 incident, separate to one earlier in the month reported reftel A, strengthens Greek belief that if Turkey is not actively escorting illegal immigrants to Greece, it is not doing enough to stop them. While pointing out that they do not intend to increase frictions in bilateral relations with Turkey, they stated they will demarche Ankara to remind Turkey of its international obligations, as well as Greek sovereignty concerns. They will also continue raising at the EU the need for EU-level action on illegal immigration, and pointed to June 2009 European Council (HOSG) conclusions noting Turkey and Libya as key countries of origin and transit. Some of the photos we saw at the Ministry - which the MFA had obtained from Greek law enforcement - were subsequently printed in the Sunday edition of a leading newspaper, along with editorial commentary about Turkish complicity in illegal immigration to Greece. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Taking up an offer to see a series of photos taken September 14 by a Latvian helicopter flying a mission for the EU's Frontex Schengen-border monitoring operation, Pol-Mil Chief met on September 21 with the MFA's Turkish Desk to discuss the second incident this month wherein Turkish radar operators harassed an EU aircraft flying a mission in Greek airspace. The roughly 15 photos initially show objects far-off at grainy resolution, in Turkish waters. Subsequent shots are taken closer, at better resolution, which identify a Turkish Coast Guard vessel leaving Greek waters eastbound, and nearby, a small craft loaded with illegal immigrants that ultimately lands on the Greek island of Farmakonisi, whereupon the passengers scramble onto the rocky shore. These photos, combined with the pilot's account of when they were taken and the times of radio messages transmitted by Turkish radar operators to "leave Turkish airspace" solidify the Greek impression that the Frontex incidents are more about immigration and less about Turkish sovereignty disputes with Greece.

¶3. (C) The Greek Foreign Ministry believes the photographs and the warnings from Turkish radar operators are proof of Turkish assistance in escorting illegal immigrants to Greece. The Greek

embassy in Ankara will demarche the Turkish MFA on this issue; we were told they would raise concerns that Turkey is meeting neither its international nor "good neighborly" obligations to patrol its borders, as well as concerns that Turkish radar operators falsely claimed Greek airspace as Turkish when they told the Latvian helicopter to leave Turkish airspace. An EU spokesperson on September 15 downplayed this incident, but stated that EU aircraft have never entered Turkish airspace.

¶5. (C) Both Turkey and Greece are transit countries on an increasingly popular illegal migration route from south Asia to the European Union, and the growing influx of these migrants over the last few years has become a contentious political issue in Greece. Greek officials have told us they understand that both countries share similar problems, and neither wants to be stuck with thousands of immigrants who can neither go on to desired destinations in northern Europe nor back to their home countries. They continue to urge Turkey to fully implement a 2001 bilateral protocol providing for Turkey to re-admit third-country illegal migrants captured in Greece.

¶6. (C) In the absence of more effective cooperation, however, Greek officials raise the issue within the EU in attempt to gain some leverage to get Ankara to take stronger action, and to push for EU-wide action, given the salience of the issue to the EU's Mediterranean states. Our interlocutors pointed us to conclusions

from the June Heads of State and Government-level European Council meeting in June, which noted the priority of concluding negotiations on readmission agreements with "key countries of origin and transit such as Libya and Turkey ..." and stated that "until then, already existing bilateral agreements should be implemented." Greece has also sought to engage FRONTEX and the EU as a whole more broadly in border enforcement, arguing that Greece faces a disproportionate burden as the EU's entry point of choice for illegal migrants.
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